

7 Easter, Year C
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Saint Ann's, Old Lyme

Lord Jesus Christ, may we all be one, as you and the Father are one, that all the world may know God's love. Amen.

Back in the early 1990's, when I was serving as the Chaplain at Trinity College, I happened across a photograph of the Chapel, that had, clearly, been taken back in the 1950's. The clues to its age were many, but two that struck me in particular were – first – that the Chapel was full (attendance at Chapel was mandatory back then), and – second - that everyone in the Chapel looked so much alike.

Now, to be sure, the school was not then co-educational, so everyone was male. But it certainly looked as though every one of those young males was sporting a crew cut. Also, everyone was wearing a necktie! If anyone had shown up with a necktie in my tenure, I'd probably have had to show him how to tie it, and it would have looked a bit odd atop sweatshirt, blue jeans, and high-top tennis shoes.

How easy it was in those days for us Christians to think of ourselves as one, as Jesus prayed that we would be. It was easy to pretend that we were one when we all seemed to look alike and we all seemed to think alike. And, apparently we all voted alike, since back then the world referred to us Episcopalians as the 'Republican Party at prayer'.

Today, however, we don't even look like one. Instead, it's all too obvious how blatantly we Christians are not always one. Beyond the obvious denominational divides, for example, we are, these days, more obviously rich or poor, and we are much more public about our different ethical and moral opinions. And even the God-given differences among us often feel like unhappy divisions: male and female, black and white, city and suburb, high-church and low-church, and so on and so on. The illusion of Christian unity no longer seems possible, much less easy.

Indeed, if anything is obvious about this morning's Gospel reading, and the prayer that we might be one, it is that we stand convicted because we certainly don't seem like one.

And if we look more closely at this prayer of Jesus, we stand even further convicted. Because Jesus didn't pray for unity and stop there. Jesus prayed that we might be one for a purpose. "I pray," he said, "that they may become one, so that the world may know that you, God, have sent me and have loved them".

Jesus prayed that we might be one so that – so that the whole world would know how profoundly God loves – profoundly enough not only to send his only son, but also profoundly enough to let that Son be killed. And so we are convicted not only because we aren't one, but also, because when we aren't one, the world doesn't recognize Jesus, doesn't know who sent him, and doesn't appreciate the depth of God's love.

We don't look like one, and that's not a pretty picture. And if we look only in the mirror at ourselves, that grim image is all we see. But if we look through a different glass, there's a different picture. In that picture we are one, because in that picture, Jesus Christ is present. In that picture, for all our disunity of appearance and style and opinion, we are one, in Jesus Christ, because we are united in baptism. We are one; because we have all died with him; because we all have life in him; and because we share a common hope of resurrection through him. We are one; because we have all been claimed by Jesus Christ – the Alpha and the Omega – and invited to take the water of life as a gift from him.

We are one, because it is he (not we) who is our center, our leader, and our Savior. We are also one in our common yearning for his presence and guidance. We are one, united in our common plea: 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.' What's more, we are one – in him – in a common mission. Regardless of gender, or race, or where we live, or how we vote, we are one, because we share the task of proclamation and service to a world that doesn't always recognize who Jesus is, doesn't know who sent him doesn't yet appreciate the depths of God's love, and doesn't necessarily want to hear from us at all.

Ironically, one of the marks that we are about our business is initial rejection. Paul, as we heard in today's reading from Acts, certainly knew something about rejection, dragged into the marketplace, stripped, beaten, and thrown into jail. And, as a friend of mine once commented: 'it's amazing what happens when you preach the Gospel – people get angry!'

Like Paul, we are called not to be appealing, but to be persistent in our proclamation, and constant in our yearning refrain: 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus'.

And if our efforts aren't always marked by initial success, we are given signs of hope. In his prayer, Jesus prayed not only for those who heard him directly, but also for all who would believe through their word. There is a presumption in there that others will believe; and surely that is a sign of hope. Surely it was a hopeful moment for Paul, as well as a joyful one when his jailer did come to believe in Jesus and then was baptized.

We are hopeful, because the ultimate success of our mission rests not with us, but with God. And we are also hopeful, because our one-ness doesn't depend on us, either. We don't have to look like the Trinity College clones of the 1950's in order to be one.

Our one-ness exists because Christ is present – present with us in our mission of proclamation and service, present in the signs of hope which mark that mission, and even present in our differences of appearance and style and opinion.

So let's claim the one-ness that we have in Christ and be about our mission, so that all may know that anyone who wishes may take the water of life as a gift.

And then, as one in Christ, let us invite the world to join our one refrain: 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus'.

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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